

Tax district OK'd for Highway 9 traffic fix

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SANTA CRUZ — It's not a solution, but a \$3.1 million partial fix to traffic backups in the Harvey West Park area has been approved — grudgingly and barely.

The real pain will remain a block away, at the intersection of highways 9 and 1, where no solution is expected anytime soon.

"It's the biggest bottleneck in Santa Cruz," said Santa Cruz City Councilman Mike Rotkin. "Nothing else is close."

The Santa Cruz City Council, with Councilwoman Mary Beth Campbell objecting, approved forming an assessment district

Tuesday to raise \$3.1 million and agreed to increase the amount the city will pay by another \$75,000.

That fell short of the \$202,000 amount an ad hoc committee comprising business and property owners thought the city should kick in.

But the difference wasn't enough to kill the assessment district.

Opponents would have needed protests from property owners representing 50 percent of the land in the assessment district to stop the proposal. When tallied by the City Clerk on Tuesday night, the protests amounted to about 38 percent.

Developer Maynard Manson could have

killed it. He didn't.

Manson argued with council members, however, that their unwillingness to knock more costs off was a "slap in the face" to some of the city's largest businesses.

"We don't want to kill it," said Manson. "We're telling you what it will take to work."

The assessment district was proposed to pay for a traffic signal at Encinal and Highway 9, a new street connecting Fern Street with Coral and Encinal streets, striping on Highway 9 and flood control work on Pogonip Creek.

The work is to help alleviate the backups now caused by the approximately 2,500 em-

ployees who work in the industrial park, visitors to the city's Harvey West Park, and Costco shoppers.

Business and property owners, however, objected that their assessments would do nothing to fix the real problem at highways 1 and 9, and residents objected to being charged for traffic they didn't generate.

As a result, the City Council agreed to defer assessments on residential property until the property was sold or converted. Although not legally obligated, the city, which owns about 20 percent of the property, also agreed to pay about 28 percent of the

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costs of the assessment district.

The city's \$1.2 million share is "substantial by any measure and greater in proportion than the city's square footage ownership," said City Manager Richard Wilson.

Members of the ad hoc committee, which included representatives from Plantronics, Costco, and Santa Cruz Operation, felt the city should pay 38 percent, or \$202,000 more and proposed that as a condition of their support.

They asked that the city pick up a larger share of the cost of the stop light and waive inspection fees and administrative costs.

Committee members also asked that the city pursue a solution to the highways 9 and 1 with Caltrans, whose jurisdiction covers

the highway intersection.

Manson pointed out that some property owners had agreed to support the assessment district in 1989 when it was proposed at a cost of \$1.3 million.

Costs subsequently climbed to \$3.1 million, primarily because the city added almost \$1 million in flood control and storm drain work and because of costs of the traffic light.

Manson pointed out that if the assessment district failed, the city would be stuck with the bill for the approximately \$800,000 worth of work already done.

Council members agreed the city would pick up \$75,000 more of the costs, but not the \$202,000. "We have to deal with fiscal reality," said Councilman Mike Rotkin. "We just don't have it."